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From y Author

A

SECOND LETTER

TO THE

Rt. Hon. CHARLES JAMES FOX,

UPON THE

DANGEROUS AND INFLAMMATORY

TENDENCY

OF HIS

LATE CONDUCT IN PARLIAMENT:

IN WHICH THE

PRINCIPLES, THE DUTIES, AND THE COMPOSITION

OF

MINORITIES

ARE PARTICULARLY CONSIDERED.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE FIRST LETTER.

Utcunque ferent ea facta MINORES.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

A

SECOND LETTER

TO THE

Rt. Hon. CHARLES JAMES FOX.

SIR,

IN the Letter I had the honour to addreſs to you at the beginning of the year, on the ſubject of your parliamentary conduct, I endeavoured to point out to you the importance and dignity, as well as ſome of the duties, of that high ſituation you have ſo long held, as chief of the Minority in the Houſe of Commons. The ſucceſs of that little eſſay, as well as the candour with which, if I am rightly informed, you were pleaſed to receive it, might be aſſigned either as an excuſe or an inducement for the repetition of the freedom I then took with you, if the great reſpect I bear for his almoſt-unequalled talents, his private

 worth,

worth, and moral qualities, did not preſent a better and a truer, for any efforts I may make to recall the political Mr. Fox to his Duty, to his Place, and to his Country.

I HAVE always conſidered it as a great ſingularity in the human character, and one that reflects no great honour upon it, that through all the ſhapes and forms under which ambition and vanity reproduce themſelves amongſt us, we can never fix the Proteus in the firſt ſeat of Oppoſition, which no man appears ever to have coveted but as a ſtep and ladder to the chief place in Adminiſtration. No perſon ſeems to have aſpired to it as a final object, or to have conſidered it as a ſtation in which he could be contented to remain. The power it offers, the pre-eminence it confers, the conduct of affairs, the controul and command over others embarked in the ſame cauſe, ſo flattering upon all other occaſions to the natural vanity of man, ſeem here to have loſt all their charms and all their attractions, whether it be owing to ſome hankering which lurks unſeen in the pureſt minds after the pageantry of Courts and the ſmiles of Princes, or to that envy which imperceptibly grows from an habitual compariſon with other perſons, and increaſes with their greater

ſucceſs

ſucceſs in a common purſuit. But whence comes it, that as ambition induces a man, or a man's parents, to educate him in a particular manner, that he may become a general, a chancellor, or an archbiſhop, that it has yet never tempted any man to qualify himſelf or his ſon to become the Leader of an Oppoſition? Is it becauſe this important poſt has no ſalary annexed to it, that it poſſeſſes no patronage, that it provides neither for a flatterer nor a miſtreſs, and creates neither an Exciſeman nor a Biſhop, that it neither corrupts nor rewards corruption, nor extorts nor laviſhes the contributions of the People? I will not ſuppoſe theſe baſe and unworthy motives to have acted upon the minds of ſo many great men who have filled it ſo well; though, to ſay the truth, I know not who has quitted it ſo well as he has filled it. I think the common epitaph of them all has been written by the political hiſtorian, and that to the catalogue of all their merits we muſt add, "*niſi imperâſſent.*"

It is not eaſy, upon any ſuppoſition but that of an univerſal depravation, to conceive, why an Engliſh gentleman once advanced to this diſtinction, ſhould not be deſirous or contented to *ſit down* in it, as it is called, for life, or to quit it only at that late period when the Stateſman and the Hero are permitted to withdraw from ſcenes

of buſineſs, and, full of years and honours, live only for Heaven and for themſelves. And it is ſtill leſs eaſy to form to one's ſelf any reaſon leſs painful, why a ſtation ſo enviable, ſo high, and ſo glorious, ſhould fix no man, attach no man, be loved or valued by no man, but be conſidered rather as a ſtate of expectancy, mortification, and diſappointment, expoſed turn by turn to the malice of triumphant ridicule, or the inſolence of faſtidious commiſeration and pity.

The object of all ambition is the poſſeſſion of power, and the object of a juſt and generous ambition is the power of doing good. Opinion, confidence, popularity, are as effectually the ſources of this power as any office can be. Whoever is armed with theſe has no more need of robes, or coifs, or ſeals, than Eraſmus had of a Biſhopric.

Every public ſituation implies a truſt, and, according to the degree of confidence, and the faculty of abuſing it, which repoſe in any man, ought his ſituation to be eſteemed honourable, and moſt of all where that truſt conveys a great degree of power. To enjoy this power and this confidence together ſeems to me the moſt rare and moſt flattering of all ſituations, and the moſt worthy

worthy the ambition of an enlightened mind and a ſublime underſtanding. Kings, Miniſters, Prieſts, and Judges, are bound by ſolemn oaths, confined by jealous laws, and amenable to ſevere tribunals. The Conſtitution has taken a firm ſecurity for the performance of their duties, exacted a rigorous atonement, and made a memorable example as often as they have failed. The ſervants of the Crown act under a fearful reſponſibility to the law; a reſponſibility which, if it has ſometimes been evaded, is yet very unjuſtly regarded as illuſory by ſome perſons, who, brooding over axes and ſcaffolds, do not perceive how beneficial it has often proved to Miniſters themſelves to be able to plead it againſt the perſuaſion, the influence, or the authority of a maſter.

But the Chief of Oppoſition is the Miniſter of the People; at leaſt he might be ſo; it is his place, it is his duty, to be ſo. It is true, there is no record of his election, no poll, no ſcrutiny; but neither is there intrigue, nor bribery, nor falſe return. He is not choſen, indeed, by ſucceſsful competition, but by involuntary deference, by the ſilent ſenſe of other men's inferiority, by the general withdrawing of concurrent claims and pretenſions. His ſeat is neither the gift of favour nor the purchaſe of corruption; it is his own by the juſteſt title,

by

by merit, by inherent right, by public acclamation, and by univerſal conceſſion. From him the bond of no oath is exacted; the penalty of no law hangs over his head; no writ can reach him, no court is competent to try him; no impeachment, no ſcaffold, riſes before him; yet by his abuſe or treachery, by his neglect or crime, the cauſe of the Conſtitution, and the Liberty of the People, alike confided and delegated to him, may take an irreparable harm, for which no atonement can be given, which furniſhes no uſeful example, but expoſes them, on the contrary, to contempt and ridicule, and their future advocates to diſtruſt and ſuſpicion for ever. Was I wrong then, Sir, if I have ſaid, that this poſt, if it has its honours, has its duties too, and thoſe of ſo much dignity and importance, of ſo ſerious and ſacred a nature, that it might well be doubted whether the occupation of any other were attended with ſo great and moral reſponſibility? Was I wrong, Sir, if I ſaid, I knew of no gentleman ſo fitted to fill it as yourſelf?

But, Sir, when once a gentleman is raiſed to this pre-eminence, elected to this mighty truſt, and inſtalled in this exalted ſeat, would it not be lamentable to find him blind or inſenſible to all its honours, for I ſpeak not now of its duties;

if

if he ſhould think himſelf placed ſo high only to be a candidate for the favour of a King, or the rival and antagoniſt of a Miniſter ; if he ſhould deſcend to a ſquabble for power, and wreſtle with the Servants of the Crown before the eyes of all the world for emolument and office? Were it not pitiable, were it not deplorable, to ſee a Citizen inveſted with the pureſt Magiſtrature, I had almoſt ſaid the Prieſthood of the People and of Liberty, with the cenſure and controul of the Government itſelf, ſtruggling with Miniſters for power, or with Courtiers for places ; conſuming all his hours, and exhauſting all his abilities, in this baſe competition, and, regardleſs of the higheſt honours his country can beſtow upon him, intrigue for the patronage of a corrupted Court, or the influence of a ſordid Adminiſtration?

Such a ſpectacle were not only the greateſt indecency in itſelf, and the greateſt inſult that could be offered to a free People, but the greateſt injury too ; for nothing could ſo much contribute to withdraw its reverence for that branch of the Legiſlature where alone its intereſts or its grievances can be felt and redreſſed, or diſguſt it ſo much, and ſo dangerouſly, with the Government, the Parliament, and the Conſtitution.

The theory of our Conſtitution is widely different from its practice, and the conduct and march of Government is frequently in direct variance with the principles to which it is pretended to conform it. The Prerogative of the Crown, which is ſtrictly conſtitutional, ſounds harſh in our refined ears; and Influence, which is unknown to the Conſtitution, is a familiar term in our mouths. The Conſtitution ſuppoſes three diſcordant intereſts in the State, a kind of warfare between the King and the Houſe of Commons, and the Houſe of Lords, an independent and diſintereſted body, perpetually balancing and moderating between them. So much for theory; let us look to the reality.

While the Crown had no buſineſs with the Houſe of Commons but to extort all the money it could from it, there was a great conformity between the ſcheme and the movement of the political machine. The Commons were inclined to grant as little as would be received, and the King's Miniſters took care, I imagine, to demand at leaſt as much as was neceſſary; ſo that there was room for perſuaſion, negotiation, and adjuſtment; and not only the Houſe of Lords, but ſuch Peers as were popular with the Commons, were employed

employed from time to time in the taſk of modetation.

The Crown dreamed not of Majorities, nor the Parliament of Parties. The Houſe of Commons was then an *integral part of the Conſtitution*, and its Members pure and untainted with any intereſts but thoſe of the People who ſent them. Its buſineſs was ſhort, and was not lucrative; its action was uniform; its duties ſimple; and treachery and corruption were yet unknown; for Power would not ſtoop to ſeduction, and all the virtue of our Repreſentatives was their courage. There exiſted no party, no diviſions. The ſentiment of the Houſe was generally unanimous in the cauſe of their conſtituents, though it frequently trembled at the boldneſs of ſome of its Members, and proſecuted the liberty of ſuch as became obnoxious to the Court, or the Miniſtry, only with its prayers.

How different is the Conſtitution of to-day, when all the arts of Government, all the ſolicitations of corruption, of avarice, and of vanity, are directed to the ſole point of procuring a Majority in Parliament. How abſurd to recur at every moment to the theory of the Conſtitution; for the theory of our Conſtitution to-day ſuppoſes

the Crown to govern with a conſtant majority of Parliament, and the ancient theory ſuppoſed a conſtant jealouſy and oppoſition from Parliament.

But theſe conſiderations would lead me too far away from the object I have in view. When the Crown undertook to govern by influence, and conſequently began to ſecure Majorities in Parliament, it would ſeem naturally to have enſued, that all the intereſts of the People, of Liberty, and the Conſtitution itſelf, muſt have been abandoned and betrayed to the Government; and I think it is owing to no force and principle inherent in the ſyſtem that they were not ſo: I would rather attribute it to the ſentiment and the courage of the People, than any law or theory, that theſe ineſtimable bleſſings were preſerved in ſome degree to us, and the regal ambition intimidated and deterred from purſuing all its advantages, and exerting all the forms of law to the deſtruction of liberty.

Be this as it will, there was quickly formed, as a counterpoiſe to this evil, by the courage and virtues of individuals, a body in the Houſe of Commons, which, from its conſtant habit of oppoſing the extenſion of the Prerogative, has loſt at length all its other diſtinctive and periodical appellations in the general term of Oppoſition.

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It would be curious to conſider what Oppoſitions were in their original formation, compoſition, and views; and not leſs intereſting, Sir, than it would be curious; becauſe they muſt be brought back to that original model, or at leaſt be made to approach very near to it, before we can either enjoy any real ſecurity for the liberty we have, or poſſeſs any great chance of recovering ſuch part of it as we have loſt, or of acquiring that ſecurity for either which was promiſed, and which was purchaſed, at the Revolution. Till that time all cries of reform will, I fear, be vain and ſeditious, and all promiſes of amendment illuſory and hypocritical.

Too well convinced of the vanity and fallaciouſneſs of moſt theories and ſyſtems to pretend to one of my own, Sir, inſtead of fixing upon diſputable epochs of time, it will be wiſer to take the whole period at large during which theſe important changes have been effected. Queen Elizabeth was, I think, the firſt of our monarchs who affected any great ſhare of popularity; a diſputed title in the Sovereign has frequently had this good effect for the People; for where the right to govern is queſtionable and precarious, the duty of governing well, or at leaſt the policy of it, will be felt, whether the

Crown be held to be the gift of Heaven, or the truſt of the ſociety. I think we cannot trace higher than this capricious reign any appearances or ſeeds of oppoſition in the repreſentative branch of the Conſtitution; and we know how much that freedom of ſpeech which her Majeſty was graciouſly pleaſed to allow of at the beginning of her Parliaments, was uſed to coſt thoſe who made an indiſcreet uſe of it, before their completion. During the two next unfortunate reigns, the Houſe vindicated its privileges, and many conſtitutional queſtions and doubts aroſe and were adjuſted between it and the other branches of the Legiſlature; but it was not till the reign of Charles the Second that oppoſition to the Crown became a ſyſtem. No Sovereign but his father had yet been ſufficiently convinced of the difficulty and danger of governing in defiance of Parliament, and none but himſelf had been found capable of laying thoſe long and deliberate plans of corruption, of which his whole reign is an unbroken chain. The civil wars in a great meaſure, but more the republican forms which ſucceeded them, with the theories of equality and liberty to which they had given birth, had indiſpoſed the nation to the name of Prerogative; and a French education and French gold, together with the extraordinary increaſe

of

of revenue and taxes, had enabled the Prince to lay the foundation-ſtone, and to rear the *ruſtique* too, of that great edifice of corruption and influence, to which every ſucceeding reign has added ſome maſſive pillar, or ſome lofty ſtory, till the enormous *Louvre* obſcures the light of Heaven with its aſpiring domes, and covers the ſurface of the land with its expanded and poiſonous ſhade.

In this reign I will place the *ſyſtem* of Oppoſition, becauſe I do not know of any earlier period when a Majority of the Houſe of Commons was abſolutely neceſſary to the conduct of Government; and, by the way, it is truly remarkable, that a great lawyer ſhould place the point of the theoretical perfection of our Conſtitution in this reign, in which its whole theory was effectually changed and ſubverted; and it ſhews how much men are the dupes of their own peculiar habits and ſtudies, when ſo enlightened a writer could date the perfection of the Conſtitution from the birth of an Act of Parliament, or find the *acmé* of liberty in the moſt corrupt and degenerate period of all our hiſtory.

When a nation is vicious it cannot be free; a corrupted people is not capable of liberty, is not capable

capable of deſiring it, except to abuſe it; for it is not liberty to change Conſtitutions as often as we are diſcontented or ſplenetic, but it is liberty *in* the Conſtitution that a wiſe or virtuous people muſt deſire.

By the change that has taken place in our original Conſtitution; by the frequency and long duration of Parliaments; by the practice of governing by Majorities; a great part of the duties which were thoſe of the whole Houſe before, are become thoſe of the Oppoſition at preſent; and particularly the controul of the Executive Government, which would be effectually loſt by this co-operation of Majorities and Miniſters, if it were not ſupplied by the vigilance, the virtues, and the popularity of Minorities.

The invention of the practice of bribery in the Houſe of Commons, is generally aſcribed to Lord Clifford, the bad and violent Miniſter of a bad and artful Prince; but the Crown had, in earlier periods of our hiſtory, endeavoured, and ſucceſsfully endeavoured, to corrupt the defenders of liberty. In ſhort, wherever there is a Crown and a Court, and a great revenue, there will be corruption; we need not look for any other ſource or parent, nor is it juſtly to be fathered

thered upon the baſeneſs of any individual; it derives from the very principles and nature of ſuch inſtitutions; and the wiſdom of our Conſtitution is, no doubt, defective and improvident in having invented no other check againſt it but the integrity of thoſe very men who are the moſt expoſed to its temptations. It, however, ordained the frequent change of thoſe men, which originally was annual, though ſince, by what means it is uſeleſs to trace, they are exempted for ſeven years from giving their accounts, or renewing their acquaintance with the People.

WHAT the Houſe of Commons itſelf was in the days of Prerogative, ought the Minority to be at this period of influence and corruption:—it ought to poſſeſs the ſame jealouſy, the ſame vigilance, the ſame virtues, the ſame character, and particularly that of independence; and theſe titles ought to be, and muſt of neceſſity be, crowned and rewarded by the confidence, the affection, and the reverence of the People.

WHEN Kings could no longer govern without Parliaments, they applied themſelves to govern Parliaments; and the increaſing patronage of the Crown, together with the decreaſing ſhame and

integrity

integrity of the nation, have engrafted the ſyſtem of corruption into the very conſtitution of Parliament. The only time in late periods that a Majority of the Houſe of Commons has ventured to oppoſe the Crown, we ſaw the Parliament diſſolved, and the People return other Members who were in the intereſt of the Adminiſtration. But this they could never have done, if they had regarded the contention between the King and the Houſe as a point of national intereſt or of conſtitutional importance, or as any thing but a perſonal quarrel for power; for the favour of the People is naturally directed to their own Repreſentatives; and we know, when this prerogative was more commonly in uſe, and virtuous or refractory Parliaments were violently diſmiſſed and ſent back to their conſtituents, with what affection and gratitude they were uſed to be received by them, and that they were regarded and revered as the confeſſors and martyrs of liberty; while the diſappointed, upon the laſt occaſion, were the objects of the ridicule, the mockery, and even the inſults of the People.

When the influence of the Crown, and the raſh prodigality of the People, had ſucceeded ſo far as to eſtabliſh a perpetual diviſion in the Houſe of Commons; when that Houſe had engroſſed

groſſed moſt of the lucrative offices of Adminiſtration, and had become itſelf not an inſtrument of controul but of government, it naturally ceaſed to poſſeſs the confidence of the People, which would have been wholly withdrawn from it but for the virtues of ſome individuals, who protected its intereſts, and aſſerted its rights, upon that great theatre where cuſtom had ſo long fixed the eyes of the People. Hence it came, that though Majorities were corrupt, and the Houſe had changed the conſtituent principles of repreſentation, yet it was ſtill able to preſerve a great part of the national confidence and affection. It was here that the intereſts of the nation were diſcuſſed, and its rights defended, though often in vain; the ambition and prodigality of Miniſters were expoſed, if they were not checked; and the principles of the Conſtitution were aſſerted with courage, if not with ſucceſs. The People revered their defenders, and placed their ill-ſucceſs to the account of thoſe who gave a vote for an argument, and triumphed only by numbers; and it knew beſides, that whenever theſe men ſhould have the power, they would not fail to do that for them, which, when they were out of power, they had demanded for them. A ſubtile and metaphyſical age had not yet diſtin-

guiſhed between the Man and the Office; and the People knew beforehand, that ſuch a man would do ſuch a thing, which another would oppoſe; and therefore did not chuſe its Repreſentatives from perſonal predilections, but for the obtainment of thoſe public acts, which they had pledged themſelves previouſly to procure.

Minorities, therefore, ſince the period of corruption, have ſucceeded to all the duties which lay before upon the Parliament itſelf.—That vigilance, that jealouſy of the Crown which is preſcribed to Parliament by the Conſtitution, are become the excluſive duties of Oppoſition, ſince the Adminiſtration itſelf is now little more than another name for the Majority of Parliament, or ſince, at leaſt, Majorities in Parliament are become the neceſſary inſtruments of every Adminiſtration. But as in our ancient Prerogative-Conſtitution, Parliaments were alone enabled to reſiſt the inroads of the Crown by the favour of the People without doors (which makes the chief force of all Conſtitutional bodies), ſo it is only by the favour of the People now, under our new Conſtitution of Influence, that Minorities can hope to reſiſt, with any ſpecies of ſucceſs, the united force of Power and Seduction; of Corruption

tion and Prerogative; of the Crown, of Miniſters, and Majorities.

To preſerve, therefore, this favour of the People, which makes its whole force, ſhould be the firſt care of every Oppoſition; and I think, Sir, that it ought to be the firſt care of Him who would preſide over it, ſo to compoſe it, to ſelect ſuch aſſociates, as ſhould chain down opinion to them by their character, their independence, and their conſiſtency, rather than catch at every breeze of fugitive popularity by a vain talent, or a proſtituted eloquence, which leaves frequently no impreſſion upon the mind but that of diſguſt at the unjuſt and momentary aſſent they have extorted from it. In the choice of the perſons who are to co-operate with him, he ſhould not only be delicate but difficult; he ſhould examine into their principles and endeavour to aſcertain their deſigns, and to bind them by known and certain engagements. He ſhould not be ready to receive every profligate deſerter, nor to embrace every unprincipled and diſappointed hireling of Adminiſtration; no, nor to patronize every adventurer, whom impudence or ambition, or the ſpirit of ſpeculation, prompts to purchaſe a *Ticket in Parliament*. He ſhould conſider, that it is not upon

every ſlight occaſion of pique, diſguſt, or diſappointment, that it is permitted to walk over from one ſide of the Houſe to the other, and to call oneſelf the friend or the enemy of the Miniſter, nor to be therefore only in Oppoſition becauſe one is not in office. Such perſons, if there are ſuch, would weaken any party and diſhonour any cauſe; and believe me, Sir, that every Minority which has accepted of ſuch ſupporters, has been equally injured and diſgraced by them.

The departments of Oppoſition are as diſtributable as the offices of Government, and ought not to be delegated to hands leſs pure, nor to characters more queſtionable than theſe are. They reſult naturally from theſe, and correſpond with them; for vigilance and inſpection over the Executive Government, is the ſole natural and indiſpenſable duty of Minorities; to ſupport or cenſure, to condemn or to applaud, is a ſubſequent and ſecondary office, deriving indeed from the firſt, but ſuppoſing a mature and honeſt deliberation, and a candid unprejudiced judgment. For the People has, no doubt, a right to expect and to claim from ſuch of its Repreſentatives as pretend to aſſert its cauſe, and profeſs to diſtruſt the intentions, or to diſapprove of the conduct of

Govern-

Government, that they will ſuffer no meaſures of importance to be carried without diſcuſſion and explanation, and without aſcertaining not only their legality according to the fundamental principles of the Conſtitution, which are paramount to the Legiſlature itſelf, but their ſubſequent tendency and influence either upon the ſeveral orders of the State, or upon its political relation to the other nations of Europe. This the People have a right to challenge at their hands, but it has no right to controul their ſentiment, or to preſcribe their opinion; yet, I think, it has a right to know the ſentiments and opinions of its Repreſentatives: and ſurely the Repreſentatives of the People in their turn have a right and an intereſt too, if they know themſelves to be virtuous, that their conſtituents ſhould not be kept in ignorance of them. In a free country like ours, it is not enough to know that ſuch a Bill has paſſed by a Majority, but it is important that we ſhould know by a Majority of what numbers, and more important that we ſhould know by a majority of what men. For if Parliaments were by any means to become corrupt, and to prefer the ſervile honours or infamous bounty of the Court to the intereſts of the People, it could not happen otherwiſe than

that

that it ſhould conſent to unwiſe, unjuſt, or oppreſſive acts; and it would be material to know, who had contributed to them, and who had reſiſted them; not to adjuſt the degree of our ſubmiſſion, or to vary the promptitude or the ſincerity of our acquieſcence with the proportions of number, or the eſtimate we might form of the talents or integrity of individuals; not that the law ſhould be more or leſs enforced, or our obedience be more or leſs implicit, according to our calculations or our opinions; but that our hopes might be aſcertained and appreciated, that we might calculate the term of redreſs, and the period of abſurdity and injuſtice. For *though Majorities may frequently plunge us into diſtreſs, Minorities only can plunge us into deſpair.* While the People can look to *theſe* with confidence, while it regards them with favour, while it entertains one hope, one ſolitary chance of redreſs from theſe, it will be patient under any injuries, it will endure the heavieſt burdens that a rapacious Miniſter can impoſe, and the bittereſt inſults that a profligate Majority can add to them. It will look up to *theſe* for ſuccours and aſſiſtance, and expect from *their* efforts a near remedy and deliverance. The preſſure of pain and the ſenſe of miſery are not found ſo fatal as the deſpair

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of a cure, and the eternal repetition of diſappointments. It is only from deſpair, from deſpair of finding any faithful to whom it can depute its intereſts and delegate its cauſe, that a People ever determines to act for itſelf, which cauſes the diſſolution of every ſociety: as long as it can attach any confidence or cheriſh any hope, the evil is not at its height, and it is ſtill in the power of wiſe and virtuous men to effect the ſalvation of their Country, defend the State, and reſcue the antient inſtitutions from the ruin and deſtruction which threaten them.

A Minister by the abuſe of his influence, or by the fatality of his counſels, by corrupting or deceiving a part of the Houſe of Commons, may indeed bring it into great diſrepute, and diminiſh the confidence and affection which the People ſo naturally repoſe in it; but he never can poſſeſs the power to extinguiſh their hopes, and drive them to an abſolute deſperation. No, Sir, believe me, whatever is the complaint, and whatever is its juſtice, againſt corrupt Majorities, they have not been, and they cannot be ſo dangerous or ſo fatal to the Conſtitution as corrupt Minorities; or at leaſt, they can only be fatal to them, when Minorities are equally corrupt and odious with themſelves,

ſelves. Whatever were the follies of the one, or their crimes either, they muſt be ſhort, and could never be dangerous, if there were either great wiſdom or great virtue in the other. If thoſe were violent and theſe were firm, the dignity of the laſt would not only repreſs, but expoſe and diſcredit the turbulence of the firſt; and if theſe were mercenary and ſhameleſs, the integrity and independence of thoſe would but appear ſo much the more conſpicuous, till compariſon, which is the *forte* of the People's capacity, had attached the whole force of public opinion and public favour to their cauſe. Such a Minority would preſerve and nouriſh hope under every diſappointment and diſaſter; it would fix all the attention of the wiſe, and all the vows of the virtuous; it would draw to it all the intelligence and all the energy of the active, and it would recall the ſpeculative from their reveries and their theories; it would unite the various talents and qualities of individuals, and direct them to the common object; it would chain ambition and enterprize to the only honeſt —the Public cauſe; and guide them in the only ſafe—the Conſtitutional career.

With ſuch a Minority, the Houſe of Commons would not be daily inſulted and menaced with reforms "from without." Clubs and political Aſ-

ſociations

ſociations would not dare to impoſe their abſurd and unconſtitutional opinions and creeds, nor to publiſh their ridiculous Reſolutions and cenſures; they would not be able to diſtract and perplex the ignorant, and more than the ignorant, the half-informed; nor could they draw away the attention of the wiſe and able from the great theatre of Parliament to Municipal Diets and Parochial Conventions. The whole maſs and ſtock of the national information and talents would be collected and concentered in this point, from which neither ſpeculation, nor hope, nor diſappointment, could any longer prevail to divert them.

I THINK, Sir, the People *would naturally*, and I am ſure it *might reaſonably* expect from ſuch a Minority, as much redreſs for the paſt, as much ſecurity for the future, as much amendment, and as real reformation, as it could hope for from theſe wild and dreaming Societies, and from men for whom its rooted contempt and averſion could only have been conquered by its deſpair of any legal remedy, by its reſentment, and its miſtruſt of thoſe perſons who pretended to be its friends and protectors in Parliament.

Such a Minority too, Sir, from the natural courſe of events, could not long remain the weakeſt in the ſtruggle. No favour, no *predilection*, no *obſtinacy* in the Prince could long defend a Faction againſt the weight of ſuperior talents, ſuperior virtues, and above all, againſt the voice of the People. The Miniſters whoſe ambition, and the Princes whoſe weakneſs, has engaged them in this unequal conteſt, have, I think, all of them ſooner or later had occaſion to repent of their temerity; and their hiſtory ſtill ſerves as a negative example to ſuch of their ſucceſſors as their follies or their paſſions might lead into the ſame deſperate career. But even during the conflict, I do not recollect that the Conſtitution has ever been ſo much endangered as the Government, or that any greater miſchief has ariſen than ſome political inconvenience and ſuſpence, ſome temporary inferiority or partial diſadvantage, inſeparable from the diſunion and colliſion of conſtituted authorities.

But it were more peculiarly to be wiſhed at this period of time than at any other which occurs to me ſince the Revolution, that the Houſe of Commons had contained in its boſom a Minority ſo compoſed and ſo conducted as it might have been, as it ought to have been, and as it

was

was expected to have been, both by your friends, Sir, and your enemies, from the moment you aſſumed the helm, and undertook to direct it; it were to be deſired, Sir, above all things at this moment, not for party or private views, but for objects of great national intereſt and importance, for procuring to the Conſtitution that degree of ſecurity and perfection which were promiſed to it at the Revolution, and which have been ever ſince eluded by the unreaſonable fears or the pretended fears of every Adminiſtration, and the ſervile or intereſted compliance of too many Parliaments.

I THINK, Sir, that no man who has read our Hiſtory can have the impudence, and no man who underſtands our Conſtitution can have the baſeneſs to deny, that it was underſtood and contracted at the Revolution in 1688, that ſomething was ſtill further to be provided as a ſecurity for the freedom of Elections, and for the maintenance of the Independency of Parliament. The Influence of the Crown, it was even then foreſeen, would, in the courſe of time, prove more dangerous to a free Conſtitution, than Prerogative had ever proved to a People who had both the right and the reſolution to be free. The late

events had afforded a ſufficient document to Princes that the People would not be frightened out of liberty; but there is yet no proof, or rather there are proofs to the contrary, that a free People may not be cozened or bribed to part with its liberty. The ſecurity therefore demanded and promiſed, was not a ſecurity againſt Prerogative, which was feared by no man of common ſenſe, but againſt Corruption, which was dreaded by every man of common honeſty. With the enormous increaſe of public debt and public revenue, of the civil liſt, of offices and places; by the practice of maintaining ſtanding armies, and ſtanding parliaments, as they have been called by a great ſtateſman; all the fears of the Whigs at the Revolution have been realized, and we are arrived at that epoch of rottenneſs and corruption which forms a criſis in our political exiſtence, and ſuppoſes either a ſpeedy cure, or a near diſſolution. I do not detail theſe invidious circumſtances with any pleaſure, and ſcarcely with any hope; I fear we are arrived at thoſe times ſo touchingly deſcribed by Tacitus, in which *nec mala noſtra nec remedia pati poſſumus.* If I have any hope, it is in *you*, Sir.

It would lead me far beyond the limits of a Letter, and tranſgreſs beyond the probability of forgiveneſs, were I to enumerate what has been done, and what has been demanded, to effect this juſt and neceſſary barrier againſt the increaſing Influence of the Crown during the intervenient reigns. Some ſalutary Bills have been paſſed, particularly the Place-Bills; but the ulcers of the State required not theſe topical applications and plaiſters, but a ſearching and ſevere alterative, that had power to correct the corrupted humours, and reſtore the elementary purity of the blood.

After all the diſaſters of the American war, the ill-humour, I ſhould think, rather than the ſincere conviction of a Majority of the Houſe of Commons paſſed that memorable Vote, "That the "Influence of the Crown had increaſed, was in-"creaſing, and ought to be diminiſhed." This certainly was a favourable conjuncture, the moſt favourable that had preſented itſelf ſince the Revolution, for completing that great but imperfect work; and I am certain, that if the Parliament had long purſued that honeſt declaration, by a decent adherence to the ſpirit of it, or even preſerved the forms of reſpect for the truth of it, all

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our juſt hopes would not have been eluded by Mr. Burke's Bill; which however was undoubtedly as honourable to him, as it was diſgraceful to thoſe who contrived to confine its operation, and to defeat its effects.

I SHALL not dwell upon this point, becauſe if there were any man in the nation ſo ſhameleſs as to pretend, that the Influence of the Crown was at this day leſs formidable than it was at the time of that Vote, or that an effectual ſecurity had been provided for the Independence of the Houſe of Commons by the operation of that Act, I ſhould certainly not condeſcend to argue with him, or to anſwer him; and I will not anticipate ſo much baſeneſs or impudence in the moſt corrupt partizan of the moſt corrupt Adminiſtration; nor ſuppoſe that to exiſt, which, if it did exiſt, muſt ſoon periſh from its own conſtituent impurity and rottenneſs.

A CIRCUMSTANCE that ſeemed ſtill more favourable to the attainment of theſe ſalutary purpoſes, was the King's choice of a perſon to hold the firſt place in his confidence, who had diſtinguiſhed himſelf upon that very occaſion, and who had added to all his other claims to confidence

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and popularity, that of having propoſed the Reform of the Parliament itſelf, as the only real ſecurity we could have for its Independence.

UNDER theſe auſpices, a ſolemn Vote of the Houſe of Commons, which ſurely had *good reaſons* to know the truth that it publiſhed, which deplored that truth, and aſcribed to it the war and all its misfortunes, its ill conduct, and the fatal perſeverance in it after it was reprobated by the nation; I ſay, under theſe auſpices, and with a Miniſter already conſpicuous for the part he had taken upon that occaſion, the nation expected, and ſeemed to anticipate, and none but an intereſted band of courtiers and ſycophants pretended to fear, a temperate and ſalutary Reform, free from ſpeculations, theories, and experiments, and which ſhould carry us back and bring us nearer to old principles, without expoſing us either to the real dangers which might ariſe, or the falſe objections which might be pretended from new ones.

I SHALL take up but a very few moments of your time, Sir, in enquiring how theſe juſt hopes and reaſonable expectations of the nation have been not only defeated, but removed farther out of our

reach

reach than they were before the Parliament had declared the duty of diminiſhing the Influence of the Crown, and the Miniſter that of ſetting limits to the Corruption of Parliament. Theſe facts are too recent to require any elucidation; it is only into the cauſes of them that it can be neceſſary to enquire.

They who expected any Reform from the Miniſter, were certainly very little acquainted with the hiſtory of Miniſters, and ſtill leſs with the nature of Courts; and they who expected any farther diminution of the Influence of the Crown from Parliament, had forgot that the nature of Parliaments had been vitiated and corrupted, and knew little of the nature of men. But thoſe perſons who expected a Reform upon any good grounds expected it from the Minority, who, whether ſincere or not, whether virtuous or not, could not preſs the Miniſter upon any point ſo popular for themſelves, and ſo embarraſſing for him. It was thought on the one hand, and however unjuſty it was not thought abſurdly, that the Court muſt truckle to a Miniſter ſo popular, and whoſe popularity would increaſe if it were known that he diſputed with it upon that point; and upon the other hand, that the Miniſter would prefer to the precarious

precarious favour which might attend his compliance with the views of the Court, that ſolid and permanent popularity which would crown his reſiſtance, and enable him finally either to govern or to defy it. Thoſe who argued in this manner were certainly not unjuſtifiable in their expectations, but their expectations became unjuſtifiable as ſoon as they were once diſappointed; becauſe it was then clear that the Miniſter had made his election, and that if they would have a Reform, they muſt look for it at the hands of Oppoſition, and give to Oppoſition all the force and all the credit which was neceſſary to enable it to preſs the Miniſter with vigour and effect. But this was not in their power, Sir; and I will tell you the reaſon why it was not: It was becauſe they were not able to give it their confidence, for the *power they could give* was inſeparable from the *confidence they with-held*; and they with-held their confidence, becauſe they ſaw the Minority contending not for principles but for power, and diſputing not for the Conſtitution but for the Government.

This is the firſt ill effect I ſhall ſtate of the indecency and ill-conduct of Minorities, and a more ſerious one, or one more likely to prove

fatal to our Conſtitution and liberty, I defy ingenuity to point out. For not only has it been the cauſe of our miſſing that Reform which we wanted, and ſuffering that opportunity to go by which was ſafe and favourable for it, but it has expoſed us to the danger of a violent and unparliamentary Reform, and that at a period when it could be plauſibly pretended that we were not able to receive even that legal and temperate one which we wanted.

Certainly, Sir, no Oppoſition can render any very eſſential ſervices to the Country if it does not poſſeſs its Confidence, and that in a very high degree; for the beſt, the wiſeſt, and the pureſt that our imagination could create, would have to wreſtle with an enormous preponderance of power, and a ſtill more enormous maſs of corruption and venality. Yet are we continually ſtunned with the repeated calls of Miniſters for Confidence, while Oppoſition dares not put in its own feeble claim, nor diſpute that impudent one of its enemies, either with the ſucceſs or the dignity that it ought to do; which is ſo much the more worthy of conſideration, as the pretences for Confidence have, no doubt, been puſhed of late by Adminiſtration to the full length that the

the Conſtitution will warrant Parliament in granting it; and becauſe when it is granted even as far as it can be demanded, it is no more than a temporary ſuſpenſion of that fixed and inherent ſuſpicion which the Conſtitution preſcribes and delegates to Parliament; whereas the Confidence that muſt be claimed and enjoyed too by thoſe who love, and who would defend the Conſtitution, if it be not a vain title they affect, is a perpetual exiſting ſentiment, communicating to them all their force, all their energy and vigour.

The root of this miſchief is, no doubt, in the Compoſition and Conduct of Minorities themſelves, and it is vain to aſcribe it to the power, the wealth, or the artifices of the Treaſury; for with theſe every Oppoſition muſt lay its account to contend, and thoſe eſpecially, and in the moſt extreme degree, from whoſe wiſdom and integrity the Treaſury has the moſt to apprehend. But the favour of the People could not for a very long period of time be drawn away from ſuch an Oppoſition, by all the gold or all the arts of Government; while an Oppoſition that ſhould be a contraſt to this, might and would forfeit it almoſt inſtantaneouſly, and forever, by its own defects, negligence, and imprudence. Armies diſſolve daily and crumble away, from contempt and miſ-

truſt of their own leaders, which have never failed to acquit themſelves of their duty, as often as they have had nothing to dread but from the force or the tactic of the enemy.

This contempt and miſtruſt of Oppoſition was not merely a negative evil, which rendered it impotent and paralytic, and enabled Miniſters to triumph (without much decency it muſt be confeſſed) over its weakneſs and nullity; it ſoon became an active cauſe of miſchief, and the fruitful ſource of much inconvenience and danger. For they who had been deceived or diſappointed in the Miniſter, and could not or would not confide in the Oppoſition, were compelled either to abandon their hope of any amendment, or to betake themſelves to violent and extraordinary means of obtaining it. Fatigued and exaſperated with what they ſaw, and hopeleſs of the future, for ſome time they adopted a ſullen and ſuſpicious neutrality, or lent an equivocal and precarious ſupport to either party as their ſpleen directed them, rather than any juſt expectation or principle; till finally their juſt contempt and their unjuſt deſpair threw them into the arms of projectors, and quacks, and metaphyſicians, the Roſicrucians of this enlightened age. They began to brood over all thoſe pure and elegant theories,

theories, and entertained thoſe delightful viſions and forms of deluſive perfection that float in the political empyræum. Soaring above the groſs elements of Human Societies, their ardent and refined imaginations expatiated into States compoſed not of ſoldiers and huſbandmen, but of angels and men made perfect, and governed this corrupted maſs by moral harmony, by conſent of virtues, and by the will purified. Amiable madneſs! ſublime delirium! I think, Sir, to the fanatic of this kind we may ſay, "Too much "virtue hath made thee mad," as the Roman Governor ſaid to the Apoſtle of the Gentiles, that too much learning had made him mad. But he that would proſcribe rather than reclaim him; he that would ſmother him rather than attempt his cure; he that could command the uſeful regimen, or impoſe the neceſſary conſtraint, without feeling tenderneſs and commiſeration for his *ſplendid error*, may be fit indeed to be a Miniſter, but a Miniſter at the Court of Morocco, or of Conſtantinople.

Yet, Sir, it is not to be concealed, that theſe perſons do not only become uſeleſs but dangerous in Society. There is a free-maſonry in unhappineſs and diſappointment, by which the diſappointed

ed and the unhappy quickly diſcover one another wherever they meet, and which facilitates and cements their union and correſpondence. Beſides, their enthuſiaſm makes proſelytes wherever they appear, and the beauty of their doctrines, contraſted with the palpable corruption of Governments, expands the margin of diſcontent around them; the virtuous are caught by their hearts, the ſanguine by their imaginations; every proof is canvaſſed, debated, argued; every fact is revoked in doubt or expoſed to denial; and an undiſtinguiſhing Pyrrhoniſm, or a wild ſpeculation, ſweeps away every principle from the mind: law, cuſtom, authority, antiquity, religion itſelf, loſe their hold upon it, and ſeem but ſo many names under which fraud and tyranny have from time to time concealed their uſurpations. From hence ariſes that ſoreneſs and impatience under the commoneſt exertions of authority, that ripeneſs for inſurrection, that fondneſs for novelties, that eagerneſs after any change, that ſubtilty, that captiouſneſs in argument, which have ever cloſely fore-run the Revolutions of civilized States: for all theſe "*ragionamenti*" do not only looſen and impair the general affection and reverence of the People for the laws and inſtitutions of their Country, and thereby accelerate the political diſ-

ſolution,

ſolution, but they weaken the phyſical reſources of the State, by abſtracting men from their individual occupations and purſuits, and by diſguſting them not only with the form of their government, but with the lot of their exiſtence.

To ſpeak candidly, Sir, the circumſtances of theſe times, which ſo many events from abroad have contributed to render anxious and critical, have not been at all re-aſſured by the conduct of every branch of the Legiſlature at home. The perſons, whoever they were, for I will not name them, whether it were thoſe who adviſed or thoſe who made it neceſſary for the King to appeal from his Parliament to his People in the year 1784, have, no doubt, already ſeen reaſon to repent of that fatal meaſure, not one half of the ill-conſequences of which are as yet exhauſted, and which, I will not heſitate to ſay, has accelerated by many years the moſt fatal criſis of the Britiſh Conſtitution. I am ſure, Sir, that you will concur with me in opinion, that this mighty prerogative of the Crown cannot be exerted with too cautious, too timid, a hand. Every premature and violent diſſolution of the Parliament, let the *cauſe* or the *neceſſity* of it be what it will, preſents but a dilemma of evils; for if the People return the ſame Repreſentatives,

Repreſentatives, and adhere to the Reſolutions of its own Deputies, then is the Government by ſo much the more weakened and expoſed, as it has added to all its imputed failings this new and unſucceſsful meaſure of violence and revenge; but if the new Election prove what is called favourable to the Crown, then ariſes a real and laſting danger to the Conſtitution; for the People feeling that it has puniſhed one ſet of Repreſentatives, and rewarded other perſons whoſe opinions have *cómplied* or *coincided* more with its own, is naturally eager to exert this juriſdiction at every turn; and having once been taught the poſſibility of triumphing over Parliament, more eaſily entertains the viſions and promiſes of ſpeculative diſcontent, liſtens to every theory of Reform and Re-organization, and receives and cheriſhes the whole family of Projects, Experiments, and Syſtems.

If, during the ſame period of time, another branch of the Legiſlature, in which it cannot be expected the People ſhould repoſe an equal confidence, which it cannot perhaps even regard without ſome natural ſuſpicion and jealouſy, were to afford its enemies an opportunity of reproaching it with remiſſneſs or negligence in the diſcharge of its duties;

duties; if it were poſſible, with any ſhadow or appearance of truth, to impute to it delay, indolence, or faſtidiouſneſs, in the execution of the moſt ſacred and the moſt important of all its judicial functions, and to heap upon all the odium of Ariſtocracy and Privilege the crime of protracting or of diſappointing Juſtice, and that in a national proceeding; it could not be conſidered as extraordinary, that the activity of Agitators and Reformers ſhould re-double, as well as their expectations, and that treachery and malignity ſhould inflame the honeſt reſentment of the People!

And if, during this ſame period, the wiſe and honeſt of every party in the kingdom had beheld with extreme concern and trepidation the incomputable acceſſion of power and influence which the Crown derived from the controul and government of India; if they deteſted the occaſion, upon whichever ſide they felt themſelves obliged to range in the diſpute, which furniſhed the Adminiſtration with the means of a triumph over the Houſe of Commons; if they beheld with ſuſpicion every ſpring of vanity and ambition ſtrained, new Orders of Knighthood invented in one Country, and the oldeſt and moſt honourable extended in another; if they counted the number of new

Peerages; and if, amidſt the prodigality with which the Crown diſpenſed its honours, they thought there was a deſign to perſecute or to mortify particular families which did not enjoy the favour of the Miniſter;—I ſay, Sir, if they beheld, or thought they beheld, all theſe things together, or in a quick ſucceſſion, can it be wondered at that they turned their eyes with eagerneſs towards Oppoſition; that they began to examine what means of *protection* or of *defence* were left them; and can it be ſufficiently lamented that they were forced ſo ſoon to turn their eyes *from* it in diſguſt, diſappointment, and deſpair?

UNDER a patriot Prince, and an honeſt Adminiſtration, no direct attack will be made upon the Conſtitution and Liberty. It may be pretended, we can have nothing to fear but in proſpect and reverſion. But this is enough to fear; for a precarious Liberty is miſcalled Liberty, and that ſtate of things cannot paſs for a Conſtitution, which may finiſh in an inſtant by the changing of men, or by men's changing their minds. Let us ſpeak out, Sir; ſuch Liberty is but the ſuſpence and procraſtination of ſlavery; and ſuch a Government, I mean a Government which ſhould forbear indeed from any acts of violence or oppreſſion, but

but ſeize every opportunity of acquiring the means and the power of doing them with impunity, would be as unconſtitutional, though not ſo wicked, as if it did them. He who ſhould ſeize the title-deeds of my eſtate could pretend but to little merit if he did not conſummate his robbery, and eject me from the land; he leaves me a prey to the firſt ambition or avarice, either his own or another's, that is tempted by the opportunity, by the weakneſs of the poſſeſſor, or by the richneſs of the poſſeſſion.

CERTAINLY, Sir—I cannot repeat it too often—certainly, if ever we had an occaſion for a wiſe and a virtuous Oppoſition, it is now; now, Sir, when the virtues of the Prince, or the moderation of a Miniſter, are thought by ſo many people the beſt bulwarks of the Britiſh Conſtitution. But they who are contented with ſuch a ſecurity do not bear a Britiſh ſpirit, and are ſo far from deſerving to live under a free and a fixed Conſtitution, that they do not deſerve even the ſuſpenſion and forbearance of that power to whoſe diſcretion they are baſe enough to abandon themſelves and the liberties of their Country. I know and I feel, Sir, and I think I feel it in common with you, that our Conſtitution, which is the form of our Liberty,

is our birthright, an independant and eternal poſſeſſion, a " κλημα εις αιει," which nothing but our own cowardice and depravity can alienate, which is entailed in our blood, and which nothing but baſtardy and degeneracy can forfeit; our title is pure and paramount; we owe neither rent, nor ſuit, nor ſervice; and we will never conſent to hold it in *baſe tenure* of the Crown, nor to do homage for it to the virtues or moderation of a Miniſter.

TYRANNY, it has been well obſerved, does not conſiſt in the number of ſtripes we receive, but in the power which exiſts to inflict them; and the Liberty of Rome, you will remember, Sir, did not expire when Octavius and his partners publiſhed their tablets of proſcription, but when Cæſar *pardoned*.

WHEN men turned their eyes and looked for ſuch an Oppoſition as might be able to reſiſt this mighty maſs of Influence, and this dangerous Confidence in the Government; when they caſt about to repair what was decayed, and to perfect what was left defective in the Conſtitution; when they hoped not only to procure to it that ſecurity which was promiſed at the Revolution, but to invigorate and ſtrengthen it, by reducing it to the

principles

principles which then prevailed, the rights which were then acknowledged, and the purity and ſimplicity of its original inſtitution ; how were they aſtoniſhed and confounded to find the perſons in whom all their hopes were centered buſily employed in wrangling, intriguing, and diſputing for places, meaſuring themſelves with Miniſters, and comparing the relative merits of ambitious ſchemes which had ſucceeded with ambitious ſchemes that had miſcarried! On the other hand, they contemplated a preponderant Adminiſtration, directing and governing every thing, virtually inveſted with the whole Legiſlative and Executive Authority of the State, denying their juſt demands, and eluding its own ſolemn promiſes. But on the other they beheld a feeble and disjointed Minority, without a fixed deſign or an acknowledged principle, conteſting the plaineſt propoſitions, oppoſing the moſt ſalutary, the moſt neceſſary meaſures, and impeding and clogging the wheels of Government : upon every occaſion they heard it rail, and cavil, and cenſure, with indiſcriminate animoſity and violence, quit one attack for another, and wait and gape with eagerneſs for ſome miſtake or error in the Miniſtry, juſt as if this would give them a right to aſſume the reins of Government, and commit their own blunders in their

their turn. By their noiſe and their impetuoſity, by their falſe and frequent alarms, they found the People deaf and callous to the juſteſt calls; credulity was fatigued and energy diſappointed, and to the hope and the anxiety of the nation a dreadful torpor and indifference had ſucceeded: ſo true it is, that though Majorities may frequently plunge us into *diſtreſs*, Minorities only can plunge us into *deſpair*.

If Governments were uniform and conſtant in their deſigns and ſtratagems againſt free Conſtitutions, they would endeavour to lull the People into a blind confidence, an indolent ſecurity, and a dull repoſe; whilſt Oppoſitions upon their ſide would, if they purſued any conſtant maxims, attempt to inſpire them with miſtruſt, with vigilance, and ſuſpicion, which is not only, as Ariſtotle has called it, the beginning of Wiſdom, but the beginning and the end too of Liberty. Thoſe would appeal to their own virtues and merits, and ſoothe the People to their ſlumbers with viſions of national proſperity and glory; while theſe would recur to the jealouſy of the Conſtitution, to their undoubted privileges, and ſometimes to their abſtract rights and original ſupremacy; and they would provoke all the national character and energy

energy by calling the paſſions to the aid of virtue, and ſpeaking not only to their reaſon but their hearts. It could not, I think, Sir, have ever become a diſpute or a queſtion, which of them poſſeſſed the juſteſt title to be believed, preferred, and ſupported by the People; whether thoſe who bid them watch, or thoſe who bid them ſleep; whether thoſe who benumbed, or thoſe who inſpired and animated their faculties; unleſs they had been too often awaked and diſturbed in times of the profoundeſt ſecurity by falſe and noiſy alerts and alarms, and had their reſt ſo often broken by pretended attacks and dangers, that at length they hated the dog as bad as the wolf, and were diſpoſed to apprehend leſs from a remote and uncertain peril, than from a fruitleſs inquietude and a perpetual and cauſeleſs anxiety.

A GREAT change has, no doubt, already taken place, and, I think, a greater muſt be near at hand, when any deſcription of citizens can undertake or pretend to plead the cauſe of the People, who do not poſſeſs, and who do not appear anxious to poſſeſs, its Confidence. On one ſide, it appears to me a very forcible inſtance and an alarming proof of a very general depravation in morals; and on the other, a very wide departure from the principles, the forms, and the habits of Parliaments. If an implicit Confidence in the Servants of the Crown

is unconſtitutional, an Oppoſition compoſed and conducted in defiance of the public ſentiment is to the full as immoral as ſuch a Confidence is unconſtitutional, for the baſe corruption which buys opinion is not more fatal than the impudent ambition which braves or derides it. Good men are alike driven from either party; they are forced to abandon their arms and deſert the poſt of virtue, or elſe to look abroad for means of defence collateral to our own, and paramount to every other Conſtitution; to embrace alliances they would have deſpiſed, to form connections they would have deteſted, and to recur to principles which they would have trembled at, if they had not thought themſelves and their Country inſulted as well as injured, and been driven by contempt to revenge, and by diſappointment to deſpair.

I AM not endeavouring to apologize for the conduct of theſe perſons; for though their reſentment was juſt, their deſpair was unreaſonable; and as they ought to have been convinced of the imperfectibility of the Conſtitution before they had recourſe to other ſyſtems and ſpeculations, ſo they ought to have ſatisfied themſelves of the incorrigibility of Oppoſition, before they had recourſe

courſe to Aſſociations and parties without doors. But as much as I diſclaim making their apology, I would deſire, Sir, to preſs it upon your conſcience and reflection, whether this exceſs be not more pardonable in them, as a natural conſequence of their ſituation and their feelings; and whether it were not eaſier and honeſter to apologize for it, and even forgive it, than it would be to excuſe, or even to palliate, the conduct of thoſe who puſhed them to the precipice, and who could never have forced them to forget or to overſtep their duty, if they had not previouſly betrayed and abandoned their own.

I BEG leave to inſiſt the more upon this point, becauſe the error into which theſe perſons have fallen, or rather been puſhed, is miſ-underſtood, or affected to be miſ-underſtood, both in nature and degree; and becauſe there ſeems rather to exiſt a deſign to perſecute than to reclaim them, which is not more unjuſt with regard to them, than it is indecent in thoſe who muſt carry on the proceſs and inflict the puniſhment upon them.

IF ever there was a National or a Conſtitutional Party, it is that which demands, under whatever title—whether it would reduce the influence of Government, or reform the Parliament, or both—

I ſay, it is that Party which demands an additional ſecurity for the integrity of the Houſe of Commons; and if ever there were a Faction, it is that which oppoſes, under whatever pretence, whether it deny the neceſſity or object to the time, ſo plain a right, ſo juſt a requiſition, and ſo ſacred a promiſe.

I PERSUADE myſelf, Sir, that it will not be contended at this time, that it is not as lawful to reſiſt an unconſtitutional Influence as ever it was to reſiſt an illegal Prerogative, and that no man can yet be found who will deny that a corrupt Parliament might be a more dangerous inſtrument of tyranny than a wicked Miniſter. Let us ſuppoſe this impoſſible caſe to happen, That the Crown had not only acquired an undue influence over the Houſe of Commons, but had exerted it, either to procure the repeal of thoſe laws which define and coerce the Prerogative, or to exact from it a ſurrender of its Legiſlative faculties, as Henry the Eighth did from his Parliament—will it be ſaid that the Conſtitution has provided no remedy, and that it is unlawful to ſeek for one? Are we to believe the nonſenſe of Lawyers, and ſubſcribe to the *omnipotence* of Parliament? or, Are we to thank Heaven that we are betrayed to a mild and gentle Prince inſtead of a Monſter and a Tyrant?

The fundamental Laws of the Realm are ſuperior and paramount to this vain omnipotence; the Conſtitution is paramount to it; and all the forms of Legiſlation cannot cover an act that is derogatory or hoſtile to them with the ſhadow of law or the titles of obedience.

The caſes of reſiſtance are not foreſeen, at leaſt not defined, by the Conſtitution; they are left to the ſentiments, the ſpirit, and the virtues of Britons. Without theſe, our Great Charter, our Habeas Corpus Bill, our Act of Settlement, and our Bill of Rights, were but ſo much waſte paper and parchment. But whatever may be the caſes of a juſt reſiſtance, I think there is one ſentiment which muſt be common and neceſſary to them all, and that is deſpair, the deſpair of any legal remedy, which can alone make it either wiſe or honeſt to recur to original principles, and diſturb the common courſe and order of Government.

I have already, I believe, ſaid ſomewhere, that the deſpair of theſe perſons was unjuſt; and I ſaid ſo, becauſe I think it ſtill poſſible to deviſe a remedy for the evil: but if they did not ſee this remedy, or were not convinced that it would be efficacious, I ſhould certainly feel myſelf much more diſpoſed to pity than to blame them. If

they thought, for inſtance—and you know, Sir, that many wiſe and good men have thought—that Act illegal, or to ſpeak, I ſuppoſe, more unexceptionably, unconſtitutional, by which the Houſe of Commons, choſen by the People for the term of three years, choſe itſelf for four years more, and entailed Septennial Parliaments upon their Conſtituents; if they thought that, from that period, Parliaments had uniformly grown, as might be foreſeen and expected, more dependent upon the Crown, and more indifferent to the People; if they obſerved, that ever ſince the Revolution, when ſome remedy or barrier to corruption was promiſed, it had uniformly increaſed, and with it not only a ſervile compliance in one ſide of the Houſe but a factious ſpirit on the other; if they dreaded the continuance and progreſſion of this enormous and ſubtle miſchief, which, though itſelf the malady that preyed upon the State, was ſure to derive additional vigour from its very proſperity, and even from its apparent ſucceſſes; and if they thought, that the longer they delayed the more difficult and the more dangerous it would prove to apply the cure they deſigned; I ſay, Sir, if this was their opinion, it will not be ſo difficult to defend it, and conſequently to excuſe them, as it would be to excuſe either that ſervile compliance or that factious ſpirit, and conſequently

conſequently to defend thoſe who have by different means defeated the hope of a juſt and temperate Reform; either thoſe who impudently and unfeelingly refuſe any ſatisfaction upon this object, or thoſe who propoſe only what would overthrow the Government, and endanger, if it would not ſubvert, the Conſtitution.

But mean or impudent as was the evaſion and the breach of promiſe in Adminiſtration, it is loſt, in compariſon with the folly, the abſurdity, and the madneſs of Oppoſition. For inſtance, How came the queſtion of this juſt, this ſalutary, this neceſſary Reform to be coupled with the cauſe of France? What had it in common with the crimes or miſeries of that ill-fated country? Was Holland to be abandoned, or Ambaſſadors to be ſent to the Regicides of Paris, before we could bring back our Conſtitution towards its firſt model, and correct the abuſes of time or the lapſes of error? I do not preſs theſe points upon you, becauſe I have ſpoken at much length of them upon a former occaſion; but it is neceſſary for me to appeal to them upon this, that I may be able to ſhew how much your conduct in theſe particulars has proved prejudicial to the great object, and I think the great vow, of the nation; and that men

who

who ſaw to what lengths the violence of your temper or the intemperance of your ambition were capable of carrying you, were juſtified in withdrawing their ſupport from you, not only upon theſe points, which were ſo prominent and conſpicuous, but in declining to truſt to your hands the management of this Reform; which, if you had not defeated or retarded it by one part of your conduct, they began to think, from another, you would have exceeded or abuſed.

I SHALL only inſiſt upon one point more.—Could you think, Sir, that the Reform of Parliament could become more acceptable, or that the real fears of ſome men would be quieted, and the pretended ones of others unmaſked by the declaration of Mr. Grey, that his Motion—which, if I miſtake not, was ſeconded by you, and I think too you divided with him—"would "change, if it paſſed into a law, the Govern-"ment of the Country?" What infatuation, what abſurdity, what enormity in ſuch a propoſal! What advantage, what unexpected triumph to Miniſters! It enabled them to reſiſt where they would have been driven to evade; and to conquer, for the firſt time in this conteſt, by reaſon and argument, inſtead of impudence and numbers. What could have put ſuch a thought into

into his heart, and what ſuch words into his mouth!

Hoc Ithacus velit, et magno mercentur Atridæ.

If this declaration could conciliate no favour, and procure no confidence to the Bill of the Honourable Gentleman, let me aſk you, if your ſeconding the perſonal malice and violence of another Honourable Gentleman, and addreſſing the King to puniſh one of the ableſt, and certainly the moſt ſucceſsful, of all his ſervants, could win any eſteem or incline any partiality to yourſelf, Sir? Could you think that a fixed contempt for the public opinion, could you think that an uniform reſiſtance to the wiſhes of the nation had profited you ſo much of late, that it was now wiſe to oppoſe even its gratitude? Or did you think that the defence and preſervation of Holland were crimes, merely becauſe you had adviſed to betray or to abandon it?

By ſuch a conduct, Sir, and by an obſtinate perſeverance in it, you have not only loſt the power of promoting the wiſhes of thoſe who deſired the promiſed ſecurity, or the greater perfection of the Conſtitution, and forfeited in conſequence their confidence and ſupport, but you have

have loſt the means of reſiſting, with any chance of ſucceſs, the moſt violent and unuſual meaſures of Government. Hence we may find in one of the lateſt Acts of Parliament penalties ſo ſevere, ſo diſproportioned to the offence, and a conſtruction of guilt ſo cruel, ſo deſtructive not only of law and liberty but of moral ſentiment, that I am not afraid to ſay, that had there been one voice in the Minority of either Houſe of Parliament not already become hateful or ridiculous to the People by the abſurdity and the profligacy of the oppoſition they had lately given to the juſteſt and moſt neceſſary as well as the moſt popular meaſures of the Government, by a treacherous ſacrifice of the intereſts, of the honour, and even the ſafety of the Country, it never could have diſgraced our Statute Book, nor would it have been at this day a capital crime in Great Britain to "agree" or to "promiſe," before one overt act had taken place in purſuance of the contract. What! Is the after-thought excluded? Is the final reſolution nothing? Is there no remiſſion, no mercy, for an inſtant repentance?

Those who are carried along with the torrent of the times, and are chafed by the crowd they travel in, enthuſiaſts in their own cauſe, and ſtunned

ſtunned with their own popularity, may be excuſed, from the frailty of human nature, if they advance too faſt or too far in the purſuit of their object; but in this caſe I think, that if they who oppoſed could even have commanded the momentary attention of the People, if they could have been heard without diſguſt and prejudice by them, it would not have been poſſible for ſuch a law to have paſſed; no, not in any Parliament ſince the reign of Henry VIII. But Minorities miſtruſted and deſpiſed by the People, muſt naturally become objects of the contempt and mockery of Miniſters.

I THINK, Sir, from what has been ſaid, it is very evident that the preſent Oppoſition is not only uſeleſs and impotent to promote this great and neceſſary queſtion of Reform, but that it has done, and muſt continue to do, as long as it ſhall remain compoſed and conducted as it is, the moſt ſerious harm and prejudice to the cauſe it pretends to ſupport. And I think it is plain too, that no man can entertain any juſt hope of accompliſhing this important object, of procuring an additional ſecurity for the integrity of the Houſe of Commons from the good faith of the Miniſter, any more than from the good conduct

of the Minority. If we are not, therefore, either wholly to deſpair of ſucceeding in ſo juſt a cauſe, and to abandon ourſelves to an inglorious and a diſhoneſt repoſe, or elſe from deſpair to recur to principles collateral to the Conſtitution, and therefore dangerous (as well as unjuſtifiable ſo long as that deſpair ſhall be ſo), it ſeems to me, Sir, that we have no other choice or alternative left us, but to form a new Party, upon clear and decided principles which are deducible from the ſcheme of the Conſtitution itſelf, which are contained in it, and immediately derive and ſpring from it. We have already ſeen the difficulty of uniting men in any one mode or plan of Reform; and to ſay truth, we ought to have foreſeen it, which would have ſaved much diſappointment and trouble, as well as have deprived the partizans of every ſpecies of corruption of ſo many occaſions to triumph over our weak and ill-concerted efforts. As long as a danger can be pretended to the Conſtitution, the hirelings of Adminiſtration, and the mercenaries of the Court, will never want a pretence—no doubt an impudent one in them, and an inſult to the commoneſt underſtanding—but they will never want a pretence to alarm the credulous and inactive, of whoſe honeſty they ſo often make a tool to create

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or to perpetuate the abuſes they live by. The inſects that generate and grow in corruption, fly and buzz round the noſtrils and the ears of whoever would approach their dunghill, and offend by their noiſe and their ſmell, whether they are armed with a ſting or not.

Let us take away this pretext of danger to the Conſtitution; let us abjure all ſpeculative ideas of reform and amendment, and be contented to recur to the principles of the Conſtitution for the juſtice, and to its hiſtory for the ſafety, of our demand.

"The true point of political wiſdom," ſays a great ſtateſman who underſtood our Conſtitution well, and loved it well, and who had compared and preferred it to every other which he had ſeen or read of, "conſiſts in diſtinguiſhing "juſtly between what is abſolutely beſt in ſpe-"culation, and what is the beſt of things prac-"ticable in particular conjunctures." Let us be contented to act by a maxim ſo wiſe and ſo moderate, and let us ſhew our reſpect and our gratitude to this Conſtitution, by repairing it upon its own ſquare and model. Let us reject with becoming ſcorn all thoſe plans of foreign

architecture which dazzle the eyes and miſlead the taſte of very few among us, and, deſpiſing that tawdry ſtucco and Paris plaiſter which would but deface its majeſtic ſimplicity, clear away the rubbiſh only, and chace away ſome of that vermin which gnaws the beſt and nobleſt timbers of the building.

A NATIONAL Party, Sir, is only to be formed upon a National Principle; it would be mean and diſhoneſt, and I think unworthy even your ambition, to wiſh to preſide longer over any other. This Party and this Principle are alive and active; but they want a point of union and an able chief to direct their force and to temper their effervescence. The abuſes of Government, the corruption of the Court, its irreſiſtible wealth and patronage, are ſeen and felt by the nation with becoming apprehenſion, diſguſt, and reſentment. Thoſe who cry out indeed conſume themſelves in idle and uſeleſs efforts; but they who are ſilent wait only, and wait with eagerneſs and anxiety, for a favourable moment to make themſelves be heard.

LET us look round us, Sir; there are ſurely men to be found of abilities and of honour, and

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of property and birth too, if that is material, who have never proſtituted the one or diſgraced the other, either in public or in private life; men who would unite their voices and their efforts with ours to procure this "juſt ſecurity for the "integrity of the Houſe of Commons," if they were ſure we intended nothing more than to give it this ſecurity, which, I cannot repeat it too often, was promiſed at the Revolution, and which muſt be exacted now, if we are not too late in our demand, and have not arrived at that degree of rottenneſs and decline, that our wounds will neither bear the probe, nor our exhauſted ſtrength ſupport the action of that medicine which alone can vivify and reſtore us.

Let us reject from our Aſſociation every violent, every ſuſpicious ally; let us neither receive the friends of Monſieur Briſſot, nor the enemies of Lord Auckland, amongſt us.

Non tali auxilio, non defenſoribus iſtis
Tempus eget.

In ſhort, Sir, let the characters of thoſe who compoſe our Party be a public ſecurity for the purity of our intentions; and let the object we purſue be ſo clear and fixed, that it may not be even in our own power to ſwerve from it, or

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to paſs beyond it. I ſhall endeavour, during the courſe of the ſummer, to explain and define what theſe objects ought to be; it is ſufficient to offer at preſent for your conſideration, what I have obliquely pointed out in ſeveral places of this long Letter, that we are more likely to unite opinions, and leſs expoſed to pretended objections and difficulties, in confining ourſelves to the extenſion of thoſe remedies which have already been tried and approved, than we could hope to be if we indulged any theories or ſpeculations whatſoever. Thus, for inſtance, Triennial Parliaments, Place-Bills, and Bills for aboliſhing uſeleſs places, have all been uſed at various periods of our Conſtitution; and no man can pretend to fear any danger, whatever objections he may make to them, from trying them once more, though there are men who might pretend to be frightened, and who might frighten others at any change or innovation. At any rate it would be more difficult, I ſhould imagine, to perſuade the People that the ſinecures which are held by the richeſt families in the Three Kingdoms, could not be aboliſhed without injury to them, without diminiſhing their comforts, their independence, and adding to their burthens, than it has been found to convince the Houſe

of

of Commons that the Borough of Old Sarum could not be disfranchiſed without overturning the Government and Monarchy.

In purſuing means already tried and known to the Conſtitution, we ſhould gain one very important advantage for the public, at the very outſet; for we ſhould ſeparate the honeſt but miſtaken ſpeculatiſt from the artful and deſperate incendiary, and be able to unmaſk and expoſe all thoſe, who, under pretence of Reform, would undermine and deſtroy our Conſtitution. Such men would have nothing to gain by purifying and invigorating that ſyſtem againſt which they conſpired. But he who had only erred from too much zeal, and been but too ſanguine or viſionary in an honeſt deſign, would willingly ſacrifice ſomething of his particular idea, and recede from his ſcheme of imaginary perfection, to obtain a near, a ſpecific, and a certain advantage. He would be content even with leſs than his juſt reverſion, to be put in immediate poſſeſſion; and would give up a part of his claims, and of his rights too, as well as his expectancy, if he were offered an earlier ſucceſſion, and a better ſecurity in the remainder.

I SHALL reſerve all detail upon this ſubject till another opportunity; it is ſufficient at the preſent conjuncture, if I have had the good fortune to ſucceed ſo far in perſuading you, as I have reaſon to believe other perſons are convinced, of the neceſſity of "procuring ſome additional ſe-"curity to the integrity and independence of the "Houſe of Commons," and of the "neceſſity of "beginning any Reform by a Reform of the "Minority," or rather by laying the foundation of a new and National Party, upon a National Principle, which from the juſtice and purity of their cauſe, and the integrity and dignity of their private character, ſhould be able not only to preſent the ardent and honeſt wiſhes of the nation, but to aſſert its undoubted rights, and enforce its remonſtrances, if they ſhould become neceſſary from the obſtinate injuſtice of the Miniſter, or the hardened abſurdity of the Court.

I AM ſure, Sir, the very appearance of ſuch a Party would go farther than the ſeverity of any laws, or the fear of any puniſhment, to reclaim ſuch as have been driven by their deſpair into unjuſtifiable courſes; or at leaſt it would leave them without excuſe, if they continued any longer in them, and make clear and evident to all men, the

the juſtice of any jealouſy or ſeverity it might be found neceſſary to uſe towards them.

It would be with peculiar ſatisfaction that I ſhould employ not only my leiſure but my ſtudies during the receſs of Parliament in preparing and digeſting my thoughts upon the mode and form it might be preferable to purſue for the obtainment of the firſt of theſe objects in a parliamentary manner, and by means familiar to our Conſtitution; if I could flatter myſelf that you, Sir, were occupied on your part in preparing and uniting ſuch a Party as I have deſcribed, in ſeparating it from every intereſt but this great and national one, in purifying and correcting it from thoſe faults errors and meanneſſes which have diſgraced and enfeebled ſo many Minorities, and diſappointed the public expectation ſo often; and from motives of private reſpect, and perſonal good-will towards yourſelf, I ſhould rejoice in withdrawing you from thoſe connections, abſtracting you from thoſe intrigues, and ſeparating you from thoſe intereſts, which are neither ſafe for your Country, nor ſafe nor honourable for yourſelf. I ſhould be happy could any efforts of mine give a juſt direction to your ambition, could they moderate its exceſs, or ſet

bounds to its eccentricities; I ſhould be happy could I give back an able and uſeful ſervant to the Public, and reclaim a powerful friend not only to the freedom but to the ſecurity of the Conſtitution; and laſtly, I ſhould be happy if I could render ſo great a ſervice to you, Sir, as not only yourſelf but poſterity would acknowledge, in having reſtored you to your Place, to your Duty, and to your Country!

CERTAINLY, Sir, and you will not ſuſpect me of flattery for ſaying it, there is no man who can render greater ſervices to this Country than yourſelf, for there is no man from whom it has a greater right to expect them, whether they may be paid as gratitude, or exacted as reparation and atonement. The fond mother, almoſt ruined by a ſpoiled but favourite child, ſhuts her eyes upon half the faults of her libertine, whilſt ſhe watches the returns of reaſon, prolongs the moments of reflection, and haſtens the period of repentance and reform, ſometimes by ſevere reproaches, but oftener by tenderneſs and prayers.

4 OC 58

London, May 31, 1793.